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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

The Old and New Testament Student

VOLUME VIII.

DECEMBER, 1896

NUMBER 6

THE CHILD PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH.

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The child Immanuel.—The child Maher-shalal-hash-baz.—The Prince of Peace.—The shoot of Jesse.

It is in Isaiah, after all, that we find the pictures of the coming Messiah most vividly portrayed. However it may be explained, we must recognize our dependence upon this prince of the prophetic order for many of those wonderful artistic delineations which bind together indissolubly the Old and the New Testament, the foreshadowing and the reality. At this time we are to think only of those conceptions of the great deliverance, yearned after so earnestly by the prophet and described by him so pathetically, which have as their central figure a *child*. We may not forget that a true appreciation of these pictures is only to be gained by a careful study of the other pictures painted by Isaiah, which have other figures in the center and of which the background is something very different. But at the risk of inadequate, or even wrong, interpretation, we shall confine ourselves to the *child-pictures*. These are well known: The child, Immanuel, Isa. 7: 7-10; the child, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Isa. 8: 1-4; the Prince of Peace, 9: 1-6; the shoot of Jesse, 11: 1-9.

1. *The child Immanuel.*—Isa. 7:7-10. It is 735 B. C. Assyria, whose powerful influence has already been felt again and again by the nations on the Palestinian seaboard, is threatening Syria, Israel, and Judah. Remember the geographical location of these three nations, and, as well, the route which Assyria must follow in order to reach Jerusalem. In an invasion, Syria will suffer the first attack; and Syria and Israel, now closely connected, will be in sore straits if Assyria should attack them in front while Judah is an enemy in the rear. Since Assyria's coming is certain, Syria and Israel unite to force Judah into triple confederacy. But Judah's king, Ahaz, thinks it a better policy to make terms directly with Assyria and thus avoid the danger of invasion. To force the alliance of Judah, Syria and Israel lay siege to Jerusalem. The city is panic-stricken. The royal court is in terror. The king, while engaged in an inspection of the water supply of the city, is confronted by Jehovah's prophet Isaiah, who brings with him the boy Shear-Jashub, a name of good omen (a remnant will return) to those who believe in Jehovah; of ill omen (only a remnant will return) to those who are faithless. "Ahaz," says Isaiah, "be calm and quiet, have faith in Jehovah, and the two kings who threaten us shall not accomplish their purpose. If you will believe and trust Jehovah, all will be well." Trust in Jehovah at this time meant independence of Assyria. Could one trust in Jehovah and at the same time make an alliance with a foreign power and in making that alliance accept as all-powerful the gods of that foreign power? How Ahaz received this first message we learn indirectly from the record. He was deaf to the words of the prophet. The next day comes or the next week, and again Isaiah approaches the king in order to persuade him of the truth of the message sent from God. This time it would seem that the message is delivered inside of the palace, in the very presence of the royal family. "Ahaz," says Isaiah, "you would not believe my former message from Jehovah; I come again. Let me give you a sign which shall be evidence of this truth; a sign to be wrought in heaven or in hell according to your command." But Ahaz, the hypocrite, already in alliance with Tiglathpileser, will not ask a sign. He

will not, so he says, put Jehovah to the test. The prophet, freed from all restraint, burning with righteous indignation, utters words which are intended to strike terror to the heart of the royal family: "Hear now, O House of David, is it too little for you to weary men that ye weary my God also? You will not accept my proposition to give you a sign of the truth of Jehovah's message, therefore Jehovah himself shall appoint you a sign. Behold, *a young woman shall conceive and bear a son and she shall call his name Immanuel.*¹ For before the boy shall know how to refuse the evil and choose the good (that is, before he is, let us say, four or five years of age) the land of whose two kings (that is Assyria and Israel) thou art in terror shall be deserted. If thou, O Ahaz, wilt trust in God, he will give evidence of his presence and your enemies shall not harm you. But if you will not believe, ruin shall come upon Judah as well as upon Syria and Israel at the hand of Assyria." It was a promise of a new régime, a new political situation, dependent, however, upon the steadfastness of Ahaz's faith. The picture may be briefly summarized: In the distance Assyria, laying waste the territory of Syria and Israel; in Judah a child, the manifestation of Jehovah's presence, guarding as ruler and protector the interests of Jehovah's kingdom; Judah herself in peace and contentment because of Jehovah's presence. Was the picture realized? Not in the time of Ahaz, for Ahaz was always faithless.

2. *The child Maher-shalal-hash-baz.* — 8: 1-4. It is 733 B. C. No change has yet come in the political situation. *The people*, to whom the prophet's words addressed to the king, have in all probability become known, need further assurance of the message. There is still time for repentance and a turning toward Jehovah. The message came from Jehovah to the

¹ The prophet does not have in mind (1) the wife of Ahaz, the child being Hezekiah, who was to be provisionally an evidence of God's presence (*cf.* C. R. BROWN, in *Journal of Biblical Literature and Exegesis*, Vol. IX, 1890, pp. 118-127), nor (2) the unmarried daughter of Ahaz (*cf.* NAGELSBACH in *Lange's Isaiah*) whose disgraceful condition is thus revealed by the prophet, or (3) the prophet's own wife, Immanuel being the son of Isaiah as well as Shear-jashub (so many), nor (4) any young woman who in the near future may conceive and bear a son (*cf.* CHEYNE, *Introduction to Isaiah*).

prophet. "Take a large tablet and write on it in plain characters 'Swift-spoil, speedy-prey.' Secure reliable witnesses in order that in future times the writing may be attested." The prophet we understand, obeyed the order given. About this time the prophet's own wife conceives and bears a son. By the command of Jehovah he is given for his name the inscription of the tablet. "For before the boy shall know how to cry 'my father' and 'my mother' (that is, before he is fifteen or eighteen months of age) they shall carry the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria (that is, the two kings of whom Ahaz was afraid) before the king of Assyria." It was in 732, a year or so later, that Tiglathpileser destroyed Damascus and carried two of the northern tribes into captivity.

3. *The Prince of Peace.*—9:1-7. The time of Tiglathpileser's invasion is one of darkness and sorrow, captivity and bloodshed. It is easy to conceive the feelings of Judah and Jerusalem when the news comes that Damascus has fallen and a portion of Israel has been carried away into captivity. In this time of gloom and deep shadow the prophet preaches of the great light which shall shine. In this time of grief and dismay he preaches of exultation and joy, the joy of harvest and the joy of dividing the spoil. In this day when Israel has first come to feel the yoke of Assyria, he speaks of the time when this burdensome yoke shall be broken. In this day of destruction and warfare he tells of a time when all warlike instruments shall be destroyed. But the people whom he addressed must regard him as a visionary. How can these things be? It is true that the destruction of warlike instruments will make it possible for the yoke just now placed on Israel's shoulder to be removed. The removal of this yoke will undoubtedly bring the greatest possible joy, and because of this joy there will everywhere be light instead of gloom. But how shall this great change be brought about? The prophet tells us: "A child shall be born unto us; a son shall be given unto us and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonder-Counsellor, God-hero, Father of booty, Prince of Peace; who shall sit upon the throne of David and establish it and support it by righteous-

ness forever." The picture is the same as before; that of a child seated upon the Davidic throne, with war banished from the earth and peace established everywhere; the world at liberty and the universe enjoying this liberty.

4. *The shoot of Jesse.*—11 : 1-9. Fifteen or twenty years have elapsed and the prophet who had begun his work twenty-five years before is now a man of middle age. Another picture is presented, that of a shoot coming forth from the stock of Jesse, a branch from his roots bearing fruit, upon whom rests the spirit of Jehovah, a spirit of wisdom and discernment, of counsel and might, of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah. Judgment is rendered in accordance with fundamental principles of equity. Peace exists everywhere, not only between man and man, but also between man and beast. "They do not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." And all the nations are seeking the root of Jesse which stands for an ensign to the peoples.

Isaiah's vision was clear; but, as history shows it lacked perspective. Knowing God as he did, and God's laws, he *knew* that there would come a manifestation of God's love and mercy to the people of promise. He sees, ahead, an ideal nation, an ideal King, an ideal society. These are involved in the very nature of God himself. They are as sure as that God exists. His soul is so illumined by the divine Spirit that the picture of these things has painted itself upon his heart and brain. There was no prophet more confident than was Isaiah. But Isaiah was only a prophet; he was therefore a man. He was speaking for those about him, and must speak in their language. His thought is expressed in figures colored by his surroundings. His vision of the future is clothed in the imagery of the present; just as the prophet in speaking of the past used this imagery in his descriptions of the past. This new dispensation, represented by the *child*, and in which the *child* will play so important a rôle, Isaiah fondly imagines will come with the Assyrian invasion. He expects it within *five*, then *two* years. The invasion comes, but the time is not yet fulfilled. Is Isaiah disappointed and discouraged? Per-

haps for a moment, but only for a moment; and then again he preaches, as before, of the coming *child*. He, without question, expected this child in his own day. He declared his coming while he was still young; as the years pass he continues to look for him; and now when he is old and his work is almost finished he still looks forward, as earnestly, as courageously, as confidently as before. It was not God's will that Isaiah's day should witness the introduction of the new dispensation. Jeremiah, realizing the work to be accomplished by the captivity, assured the people of his time that the new régime would come in seventy years, but at the end of seventy years Daniel, down in Babylon, postponed it seventy weeks (not literal weeks). *In time* the child came, and in coming fulfilled the prayers and the prophecies of all the saints and all the prophets,—the child of David's family, the Messiah, the Christ.



RAPHAEL — HEADS OF THE INFANT JESUS

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